



Running a Playlist Request Service

A guide by Playlist for Life
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Introduction

Using personal playlists can have an incredible impact on the people you support in your community. Many people will be able to make their playlist on their own, but some people need help getting started. Building a playlist together can be a wonderful way to connect. This guide will help you make starter playlists for your service users in a face to face or remote setting.

What is a playlist for life?

A person's 'playlist for life' is all the songs or pieces of music that make up the soundtrack of their life. The tunes that give them that 'flashback-feeling' whenever they hear them; that take them back, to another time, person or place. Each person's playlist will be as unique them, so it is important to learn how to track down the right tunes – we call this using Music Detective Skills. Why not complete our Help Point eLearning course to find out how to use these skills, or use our conversation starters and soundtrack to your life book as templates to start making a playlist with someone.

Everyone's playlist is unique and there is no limit to the number of tunes to include but we recommend that 10 tracks is a good number for a starter playlist.

Playlist request service

This guide draws on experience from a Music Lab project run by Playlist for Life during the 2020 lockdown. People living with dementia and unpaid carers were matched with volunteers, who created starter playlists for them over a series of 3 phone calls.

Whether you are running a similar playlist request service or want to create playlists for the people you already support, we hope you will find this guide useful.

1. Before you get started

Who is going to run the service?

If you already run a one-to-one support or befriending service, then you can add making a playlist to the activities you offer service users. If this is your first time offering one to one support to service users, then we have some tips to get you started. Read Section 2 for guidance on how to set up a Playlist Request Service

How will you communicate with your participants?

This is an opportunity to connect, so you will build the playlist through a series of conversations with the person with dementia or their carer. If you cannot connect with the person face to face, then a video call is a great way to get in touch as participants can see each other and you can see the person's reaction to the music. However, many people will find a phone call much easier and more familiar. Playlist for Life has had great success using all these techniques so use the method which works best for you and your service users. You can find helpful guidance on how to communicate with people with dementia remotely from Dementia UK [here](#).

How will you deliver the playlists?

There are lots of ways for your participants to listen to their playlists and you should find the best option for each of them. Are you going to give them a physical playlist that they can listen to? If so, we have guidance on ways to get a person's playlist to them but remember that even just the act of building a list of meaningful music together can be a powerful experience and technology isn't always required for someone to get enjoyment out of their playlist.

Will there be costs?

Sending music on some streaming platforms is free so this is one way to keep the cost of your project to a minimum. If you are downloading music and giving out mp3 players, then you will need to factor in these costs. Will the people pay for the equipment themselves or will you need a budget?

2. Setting up your service

If you already run a befriending or one to one support service, then you will have structures and processes in place for communicating with participants and you should follow these. If this is your first time offering one to one support to service users, then there are a few things you will need to think about.

- Will you be running the service yourself or will you have a team of volunteers involved? Make sure that you set realistic expectations when promoting your service and only engage the number of participants that you have capacity to make playlists for. It might be best to trial the service with one or two participants and build from there.
- If staff/volunteers are working directly with people with dementia or unpaid carers, then they may require a safeguarding check. Check with your local safeguarding authority to find out more.
- Think about how your volunteers will communicate with participants. If you run a face-to-face service then think about the best place to have your sessions. A quiet space with few distractions will be best. If you are working remotely then think about the best way to communicate. There are various services available that allow you to make video or phone calls online. Microsoft Teams, Skype or Zoom all offer this functionality. If you are interested in this, speak to whoever provides IT support for your organisation.
- Think about the roles that each person in your team will play. The same people who are great at drawing out musical memories may not be confident using technology. One person might take responsibility for having conversations and tracking down the tunes for the playlist, while another creates the physical playlist to give out. If this is the case, then think about a good process for your team to communicate with each other.



3. The process

You will be building the playlist with your participants through a series of conversations. This is an important part of the process as it will allow you to connect with the person and dig down into a discussion about their songs and memories. You can take as many sessions as you think you need to build your person's playlist, we found that 3 sessions were a good number to build a starter playlist.

Think about the person you want to make a playlist for. Will they be able to take an active part in the discussion? You may want to involve a carer or family member in the conversation. Explain to the person what you are going to be doing and schedule in your first session for a time that is suitable for them. You can judge how long these sessions should be, based on the individual. If meeting over the phone, then we suggest around 15 minutes per call should be enough time for a good chat.

Make sure you have the tools to take notes on the person's song choices and any other important information you gather. If possible, also try to have a device that allows you to play music handy during the sessions. Playing clips of the music you are discussing can help people to recall songs and memories. Watch out for the person's reaction to the music, as they may not be able to tell you if there is a memory attached but if they have a positive reaction, like a smile or tapping foot, then the song could be one to add to the playlist.



Session 1 - Introducing Music Detective skills and taking notes

Be mindful that some people may not be able to answer your questions about their musical memories. You may need to take a softer approach and draw out information you can use to suggest songs for them.

Things to discuss	Talking Points
Explain that you are going to be talking about the music that's been important to them.	"Hi, it's Rebecca, are you happy for us to talk about music today?"
When discussing music, a good starting point is knowledge of their, or their loved one's musical likes and dislikes	"Are there any songs or artists you can think of off the top of your head that you/person you care for would love to hear?"
Discuss some Music Detective Skills and the type of songs that should be on the playlist, explain that they can take their time with this and you can arrange a follow up session. Use our Conversation Starters or Soundtrack to my life workbook as a guide.	"Here are some tips of the kind of songs that we've found can have a really positive impact" <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Music that reminds you of family or friends• Music from special occasions, wedding• Favourite TV shows/Hobbies/interests• Religion• Memory bump etc.
If they are finding it difficult to recall songs or are not sounding very confident, use your music detective skills to draw out some information and take notes. Try playing through some songs you think they might enjoy and see what gets a reaction.	"If you could let me know some information that would be really helpful, is it ok if I take some notes?" <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Age of person with dementia• Where they are from• Special occasions, wedding? wedding year?• Hobbies, interests, faith?
Arrange follow up session and encourage detective work	"Thanks again for your time and I look forward to chatting to you again next Thursday at 2pm. So, if you can try your best to think of some songs and I'll do the same and we can talk about it next week."



Building the playlist

You should use the time in between your sessions to start making a longlist of tunes for the person's playlist.

- Use the information you gathered on your first chat to track down some tunes you think might spark a memory for them
- Use Playlist for Life's resources for help and inspiration:

[100 Years book](#)

[Spotify Playlists](#)

[BBC Music Memories](#)

[Automatic Playlist Maker](#)



Session 2 – Creating the shortlist

Things to discuss	Talking Points
If needed, introduce yourself again and remind them about the playlist. This chat should be a chance to talk about the music you have both found.	Start by playing a tune that you have found and observing the reaction.
Check in with how they got on thinking of songs but reassure them if they did not find the time or found it difficult. Try playing through some of the songs to see how the person reacts.	<p>“How did you get on, did you manage to think of any songs?”</p> <p>“I also have a few that might work”</p>
Look out for positive reactions. If the song sparks a reaction, then try to draw out the memory. Discuss the songs and allow space and listen to the memories.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The song reminds you of going dancing?” • “What kind of thing did you wear to go dancing?” • “Did you dance with someone special?”
<p>The songs that spark reaction or draw out memories go on the playlist.</p> <p>Make sure that you choose the right version on the chosen songs.</p>	“Is there any particular version of the song that you prefer?”.



Getting the playlist to your person

There is no right or wrong way to listen to a playlist so help your person to access music in whatever way works best for them. If they already uses CDs to listen to music, they can continue to do so. If you want to gather tunes in one place and there are a few ways you can put together the playlist:

1. Send it online
2. Create it on an MP3 player
3. Send a Personalised Music Journal.

You can find guidance on each of these in section four.

If you are working with the person face to face, then you should spend some time helping the person to access and listen to their playlist.



Session 3 – Follow up and next steps

Things to discuss	Talking Points
<p>Check in and find out if they managed to get the device or link to work and gather some initial feedback.</p> <p>This is particularly important if you are working with your person remotely.</p>	<p>“Did you receive your parcel / is it all working ok / have you used it yet / did you/ you/person you care for enjoy any of the songs / what reactions did you see? / has it made a difference?”</p>
<p>Provide some additional listening tips to help the person get the most from their playlist.</p>	<p>“I’m so pleased we managed to find some songs for you/person you care for. You know yourself/person you care for best, so you’ll have a good idea how often to listen to the music but here are a few tips we have found useful:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Using it certain times of day you/person you care for finds challenging - Listen to the music around 30 minutes before difficult tasks - Take it with you when out and about - Use it for motivation or some relaxation and respite



4. Ways to send the playlist

Streaming

If your person has access to the internet, then streaming may be suitable for them. You can create a playlist for them on YouTube Music or Spotify and send it to them.

Cost: free

You can find out more about streaming and view our videos on making and sending playlist on YouTube and Spotify [here](#).

Downloading

If your person doesn't have regular access to the internet, then downloaded music is probably the best option for them. This is when you buy individual songs from an online music store and then save them on to a device such as an mp3 player.

Cost:

- Our recommended MP3 players range from £15 - £50
- 1 track download – 99p
- Headphones - £3

You might also want to buy a second set of headphones and a splitter cable so that 2 people can enjoy the music together.

Click [here](#) to find our guidance on choosing an mp3 player and buying music online. This page also includes user instructions for each player that can be sent to participants.

Music Journal

If you don't have the capacity to provide a way for the person to listen then you can still get their list of songs to them. Why not write their songs and memories into one of our Personalised Music Journals or our Soundtrack to your Life booklet? This can also be a nice addition to the physical playlist.

Cost: free to download from our website [here](#).



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